

Recursive Lions and Strange Continuities of Bulgarian Nationalism

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The aim of this article is to propose the methodological and conceptual tool of ‘recursion’ as a means of understanding the production of historical continuity and discontinuity between different forms of nationalism in Bulgaria. The recent case of the demolition of the socialist-modernist monument ‘1300 Years of Bulgaria’ and its replacement with an earlier memorial from the authoritarian period of the 1930s forms the point of departure for this examination. Adopting a media and cultural studies perspective, the text focuses on the symbolic function of lions in both monuments and how they are engaged in the production of nationalist rhetoric and imagery. In line with Ann Laura Stoler’s (2016) proposition that the method of ‘recursive analytics’ can allow us to overcome the impasse formed by attempts to postulate *either* continuity *or* rupture between present and past, I first account for the histories of the erection of both monuments before proposing to read the ‘Bulgarian lions’, featuring in both of them, as recursive figures.

Continuities of the National

In July 2017, six months ahead of Bulgaria’s assumption of the Presidency of the Council of the EU, the municipality of the country’s capital Sofia revealed plans to demolish the monument ‘1300 Years of Bulgaria’ and restore an earlier military memorial to the First Sofia Division in its place. While the modernist ‘1300 Years of Bulgaria’ was built in 1981 by the Bulgarian socialist government as part of nationwide celebrations of the anniversary of the Bulgarian state, the recently restored military memorial was first inaugurated in the aftermath of a 1934 military coup.

In this period, Bulgaria's allegiance to Nazi Germany was becoming increasingly felt on the terrain of foreign and domestic politics alike.

Both monuments – the socialist modernist one and the military memorial from the 1930s – work to stabilize a coherent Bulgarian national identity. Apart from featuring lionlike figures, the two monuments are markedly different from an architectural and aesthetic point of view – the earlier monument was executed in a strict neoclassical style, whereas the latter was carried out in a style of socialist modernism, interest in which has been rekindled in recent years.^a What makes their reading instructive for the present moment, is that they cannot be confined to a role of outworn artefacts: the demolition of the socialist monument and its replacement with the military memorial bears political and symbolic significance for *contemporary* negotiations of urban space, reflecting a reordering of geopolitical alliances. Timed to coincide with the country's assumption of the EU Council's presidency, the substitution marked a politically charged process, whereby the vestige from the monarchic period is seen as more compatible with the self-image the country wants to convey to its 'European family' than the socialist modernist monument of its more recent past. This compatibility raises questions about historical continuity between present and past versions of national discourse and imaginary, forged in the act of replacing one monument with another.

As the two monuments, albeit different from the point of view of the style and political context of their erection, put forward distinct nationalist visions, they invite a consideration of how to read their role in stabilizing a Bulgarian national identity vis-à-vis continuity and rupture. Should we consider the consolidation of nationalist discourse and politics to be part of a linear, progressive development? In this case we would be presented with a narrative starting with the struggle for national liberation from the Ottoman Empire, advancing through the pre-socialist monarchic regime with its irredentist concerns, followed by the socialist government's implementation of various assimilationist policies towards ethnic minorities that culminated in the notorious 'Revival Process'^b of the late 1980s, until we reach the present day's resurgence of nationalist parties and far-right groups.^c Or should we rather place our focus on examining the political specificities and ideological intricacies of the distinct periods at hand and work to articulate the ruptures and irreducible differences between them?

These questions have methodological, analytical, and political stakes. In this contribution, I will attempt to overcome the apparent impasse that the choice between *either* continuity *or* rupture places us in through the conceptual figure of recursion. In computation, 'recursion' is understood as a 'procedure that involves a series of discrete steps, one of which entails the relaunch of the procedure' (Fuller and Goffey 2012: 321), thus involving the production of loops and patterns, but also the potential branching out of procedures. More recently, the term has been employed to describe 'the self-regulation, self-adaption, and self-regeneration of systems', including that of coloniality (Parisi et al. 2021), whereby a focus is placed on the centrality of feedback loops and the recursive creation of a continuity of racial capitalism and colonialism. Others, such as Ann Laura Stoler (2016) have highlighted recursion's potential to enable a conceptual and methodological movement *beyond* the bifurcated

alternatives of continuity and rupture. It is this latter understanding of recursion that I will mobilize in the further course of the article.

Examining the post-Stalinist period of Bulgaria, in *Restless History* (2021) Zhivka Valiavicharska delves into the relationship between historical continuity and rupture vis-à-vis the construction of national identity by engaging with the shift in educational, linguistic and cultural policies towards ethnic minorities. Valiavicharska appraises the dark side of the post-Stalinist turn towards ‘Marxist humanism’, which paradoxically resulted in *less* autonomy for these groups. She examines the way in which the stabilization of a ‘historical linearity of the ethnonationalist narrative’ (Valiavicharska 2021: 102) was predicated upon a reinstatement of a Christianity vs Islam dichotomy; an assimilationist approach towards ethnic minorities; an emphasis on continuity between past and present popular struggles in which Bulgaria had to be articulated as at once being socialist and ancient (Valiavicharska 2021: 95). The national discourse of socialist humanists, for Valiavicharska, was meant to ‘displace Soviet-centered histories of the socialist revolution’ (Valiavicharska 2021: 103) and thus contribute to a cultural emancipation from the Soviet Union. In this account, continuity and rupture have a double significance: on the one hand, the author warns against homogenizing readings of the country’s socialist past and *against* postulating a single continuum of progressively escalating nationalist policies. For her, this approach risks erasing the specificities of the conditions of nationalist discourse and policies across regimes that are significantly different from a socio-economic and geopolitical perspective. On the other hand, as indicated above, she examines the construction of continuity of the national as an internal, productive, ideologically charged and, ultimately, exclusionary historical practice deployed by Marxist humanists (Valiavicharska 2021: 138ff).

In what follows, I offer a reading of the two monuments – the Monument to the First Sofia Division and ‘1300 Years of Bulgaria’ – and the lions featured in both as parts of larger ensembles of political signification that must be seen as focal, yet by far not isolated or static, points in the narration of the nation state. By doing so, the political stakes and complexities of present-day attempts to reshape the urban landscape of Sofia and to reconfigure its socio-semiotic order will hopefully become apparent. Competing modalities of narrating national history, divergent notions of future and past, as well as a renewal of geopolitical allegiances and orientations are all mobilized in the instance when one monument was replaced with another.

As in the contexts of other national states, the symbolic figure of the lion has become strongly associated with ideas of sovereign nationhood and is politically mobilized to project an image of immutable ‘Bulgarianness’. The lion recurs in various times and contexts, linking to artefacts, sites and calls for national identity in a way that enhances their rhetorical capacity to lay claim to a homogeneous, stable notion of what it means to be ‘Bulgarian’. It can be found on objects and sites associated with what is seen as the legitimate representations and functions of the nation state (e.g. the coat of arms, the national currency, on monuments at the entrances to public buildings), while also being used as a symbol by conservative and far-right groups. One such organization is the far-right Bulgarian National Union (BNU),

which openly declares itself as nationalist and ideologically close to the former Union of Bulgarian National Legions – an anti-Semitic group supportive of Nazism that operated in the 1930s and 1940s. Its official emblem used to feature the colours of the national flag, a stylized figure of a lion and a swastika. Today, one can purchase a T-shirt with this emblem (where the swastika is replaced by a lightning bolt) from BNU's online shop, alongside other merchandise with anti-LGBT and pro-nationalist slogans and imagery.

We can thus say that the appropriated, domesticated visual representation of the feline creature functions as a rhetorical 'commonplace' (cf. Haraway 2007) supporting and organizing nationalist discourses and imagery, but also making apparent continuities between diverse contexts where claims to power are put forward. The fact that insignias of the contemporary Bulgarian state and those of far-right groups (ostensibly sanctioned by it) have lions as a shared feature is certainly not the only way in which we can assess a disconcerting proximity between them.^d An analysis of its semiotic mobilization by various actors and in distinct historical settings is thus only one amongst many entry points that can offer an insight into the continuities between different ways of performing the nation. Looking at the position and symbolic function of two sculpted representations of lions within two monumental ensembles – both of which partake in the construction of nationalist visions in the respective periods of their erection – is a methodological choice made in the hope of enabling an assessment of continuities and discontinuities across these contexts. The aim is to neither privilege and redeem any one of the nationalisms scrutinized here (pre-socialist, socialist and post-socialist), nor to equate them by putting them on equal footing.

Two Lions

The original Memorial to the First Sofia Division featured a figure of a sitting lion, flanked on three sides by colonnade walls inscribed with the names of Bulgarian soldiers fallen in the Balkan wars (1912–1913) and the First World War (Figure 1). The memorial was inaugurated by Boris III (tsar of Bulgaria between 1918 and 1943), in the aftermath of the coup d'état of 19 May 1934. In the brief period following the coup, the government disbanded the National Assembly and dissolved the Constitution, ruling by decrees instead; undertook widespread repressions of political opponents, especially against members of the Bulgarian Communist Party; banned trade unions and imposed stringent censorship on the press. While less than a year later the monarch forced the Prime Minister to resign, the consolidation of authoritarian nationalism continued. The country supported Nazi Germany and officially joined the Tripartite pact on 1 March 1941, while passing its own anti-Semitic Law for the Protection of the Nation earlier in the same year.

The memorial's central feature used to be the sitting lion placed in its middle, whereas the three walls flanking it bore the names of 2982 soldiers from the 1st and 6th Infantry Regiments of the Sofia Division (Editor 2014) fallen during the



Figure 1. Frontal view of the Memorial to the First Sofia Division. Wikipedia Commons, public domain.

aforementioned wars. When the monument was inaugurated, it functioned as a commemorative site as well as one where soldiers were sworn into service, military celebrations and state visits took place (Tarashoeva 2014).⁶ Following Bulgaria's entry into the Pact, Sofia was raided by the Allies, and during one of the bombings the eastern wall of the military memorial was destroyed. Interestingly, after the Second World War, the socialist government did not demolish or remove the monument but rather left it at its original site until the 1980s when the space was emptied so that the new monument '1300 Years of Bulgaria' could take its place. The remaining two walls were removed, while the sitting lion was relocated to the National Museum of Military History where it spent the following decades up until its 2017 return into public space. Significantly, in the early 2000s, discourse of citizen-led campaigns requesting the restoration of the old monument discursively mobilized a moral obligation towards the memory of the 'forefathers', as a way to legitimize the venture. As Boris Stanimirov, member of 'One Legacy' (*Edin Zavet*), a group uniting the descendants of former military officers in service before socialism, stated in an interview with the Bulgarian National Radio: 'we owe these people that their names are placed at this site' (Tarashoeva 2014) – by which he meant the need to restore the plaques with names of fallen soldiers. Yet when refurbishments were commenced in the run up to Bulgaria's assumption of the Presidency of the EU, it was the lion *alone* that made a comeback into public space; to this day the plaques haven't been restored. It seems as if the sitting lion acts as a place- and time-holder for the postponed materialization of the more 'popular' elements of the memorial – that is, the ones which would attest to the loss of life in the country's



Figure 2. The monument ‘1300 Years of Bulgaria’ after its inauguration in 1981 with the National Palace of Culture in the Background. Personal archive – Valentin Starchev.

military effort. Nowadays, the figure of the lion, projecting nationalist might and pride, fills in and compensates for a double erasure: the disappeared names of fallen soldiers and the remnants of the more recent attempt to articulate a late-socialist vision of history and nationhood.

‘1300 Years of Bulgaria’ was undoubtedly a monument also involved in the formulation and stabilization of a homogeneous national identity (Figure 2). It too featured a lion, yet one that, by virtue of its position in the underground level of the memorial, was much less visible within its ensemble than the sitting lion from the military monument. As its name suggests, it was meant to commemorate the thirteen hundredth anniversary of the founding of the ‘Bulgarian state’ in 681, with the Bulgarian socialist government using the quasi-mythological tale of this foundation as a unifying mechanism through which to celebrate (and construct) a coherent trajectory of national formation.

Following Valiavicharska (2021), the overemphasis on continuity between the socialist present and the remote past is aligned with the propagation of an ethnonationalist discourse within a Marxist humanist framework. The monument ‘1300 Years of Bulgaria’ was one amongst scores of architectural and monumental sites

erected in 1981 and its instalment was part of an expansive cultural programme for the celebration of the Bulgarian nation state. The building of national continuity was executed through different, yet integrated events all taking place in this year (such as inaugurations, marches, performances, publications) and inserted within overarching themes, bearing names such as ‘The Land and Bread of Bulgaria’ or ‘Family, Kinship and Homeland’.

The ambition of the cultural programmers to achieve a unity of approach across scales is found in the execution of the aforementioned ‘1300 Years of Bulgaria’ monument, conceptualized by Valentin Starchev and a team of architects and sculptors. Accomplished in an abstract style of socialist modernism, it incorporated different figurative ensembles, narrating the history of the Bulgarian nation through four scenes.^f However, similar to the earlier monument, which was partially demolished during the war, this site also deteriorated post-1989, starting to break apart and shed parts of its façade. While not caused by bombardment but rather by systematic neglect, its ravaging eventually led to it being fenced off ahead of Pope John Paul II’s visit to Sofia – both to protect passers-by from falling debris and to limit the access to and visibility of the site (Dimitrov 2008). Hence, attention increasingly focused on the ‘ugliness’ of the exposed upper skeleton of the structure and engagement with its potential fate remained centred on these most visible characteristics.

Despite being literally buried under rubble in the process of the memorial complex’s demolition in 2017, its underground level was originally conceived as an integral part of the structure and its political function. This level featured a collection of artefacts and objects, considered exemplary for ‘what counts as Bulgarian national cultural heritage in the 1970s and 1980s’ (Valiavicharska 2014: 195), with the space intended ‘to provide space for organized collective ritual’ (Valiavicharska 2014: 195). One of these elements was a replica of an original stone bas-relief from the Middle Ages depicting a lioness creature.

If the lonesome lion of the 1934 military monument projected aggressive might and pride – expressed in its posture, rich mane, open mouth and firm hold on a shield featuring a map of Bulgaria – the bas-relief from the subterranean level of the socialist memorial was semiotically more ambiguous (Figure 3). Rather than being spatially isolated from other artefacts, it was integrated with other reliefs on the walls and fragments in the spatial composition. The bas-relief represented a replica of a stone plate featuring a creature that was described as either a ‘lion’ or ‘snow leopard’ and dated between the eighth and the thirteenth centuries (cf. Ivanov and Minkova 2008: 178). Its appeal arguably stemmed from the impossibility of unequivocally dating or ascribing it a fixed meaning, while its inclusion in the underground level of the monument can be linked to an ethnonationalist concern with tropes of antiquity, spiritual connections to the past, the land, and traditions.

The eradication of the replica of this other lion started in the early 1990s when it was chiselled out from the subterranean level of the monument by unknown individuals – a fate it shares with many mosaics and reliefs from socialist buildings and monuments. The bas-relief underwent different stages of occlusion: it first acted as a symbolic ‘cornerstone’ for the monument; it was damaged after 1989; later,



Figure 3. Bas-relief in the underground level of the monument ‘1300 Years of Bulgaria’. Personal archive – Valentin Starchev.



Figure 4. A picture of the sitting lion holding a revisionist map of Bulgaria shortly before the lion was reinstalled in 2017. Photograph by Zhivka Valiavicharska.

its remnants were hidden for ‘safety reasons’ in 2001; in 2017, these vestiges, alongside the whole underground level, were buried while demolishing ‘1300 Years of Bulgaria’.

Both lions perform unique functions vis-à-vis the construction of a national continuity in different periods of the country's history. On the one hand, the sitting lion from the 1934 monument holds a revisionist map^g of Bulgaria, representing the expansionist fantasies of the government during whose rule it was erected. Tsoneva and Valiavicharska (2017) argue that its neoclassical execution was a 'spatial and visual expression of the right-wing authoritarian state, based on ideas of racial and ethnic superiority, expansionist territorial politics and monarchy' (Figure 4). On the other hand, the walking lion from the '1300 Years of Bulgaria' memorial also performs and symbolically constructs a national continuity, one premised on an ethnonationalist vision. The lion primarily builds this continuity in a *temporal* way – that is, it maintains 'in a perpetual presence' (Foucault 1984: 94), notions of sacred, ancient past in the very foundations of the socialist modernist monument. Both lions, by means of putting forward, in architectural-visual terms, claims to territorial unity and temporal universality, are involved in the production of homogeneity of the national which comes to dominate the present. From today's point of view when a diffusion of nationalist discourse can be discerned in both temporal and spatial terms,^h while the violent effects upon bodies and subjectivities that threaten to 'pollute' the integrity of the national identity are becoming increasingly apparent, it is important to be able to appraise both the continuities and ruptures between past and present nationalisms.

Recursive Figures

The brevity of this contribution and vastness of the topic wouldn't permit me to address these questions in anything but schematic terms; what I want to explore instead is the possibility of a methodological and conceptual shift in approaching the production of continuity and rupture. In *Duress* (2016) Ann Laura Stoler proposes a 'recursive analytics' as a way of resisting the call to side with *either* a narrative of 'seamless continuation' (of colonial practices) (Stoler 2016: 25) *or* one postulating clearly demarcated, distinct historical periods. The context of her examination is formed by the issue of coloniality, whereas I am here concerned with the way in which we can conceptualize the modality of present vis-à-vis past articulations of nationalism in Bulgaria. These differences notwithstanding, it can be instructive to appreciate a shared preoccupation with occlusions generated when siding with *either* an approach that reads the solidification of hegemonic discourse and politics as a continuous progression *or* one that insists on irreducible differences between clearly separated historical periods. An engagement with the figure of the lion operating as a commonplace for the 'national' *across* timespans is what I suggest can overcome the impasse of conceiving of this production as either seamless continuity or clear-cut break.

Here, the notion of 'recursion' can be mobilized to account for the ways in which lions keep reoccurring, structuring, and co-constituting the Bulgarian national imaginary. Indeed, as aforementioned, the lions partaking in two monumental and social

assemblages are not isolated figures but rather members of a larger and more heterogeneous pride. In Sofia alone, two sculpted lions guard the entrance to the Palace of Justice; one reclines by the Ministry of Interior and two by the Monument of the Unknown Soldier; one of the city's busiest junctions, 'Lion's Bridge', is flanked on all sides by four sitting lions. The old Bulgarian word for lion, *lev*, has lent its name to the national currency, while the country's coat of arms also showcases three lions. Lions feature prominently on various artefacts from the period of the struggle for national determination in the nineteenth century (such as on flags or seals). Vassil Levski – an almost mythical figure from that period, today celebrated as national hero – is seen as a lionlike incarnation of sorts, his actual name Kunchev giving way to the popular nickname 'Levski' ('lion-like'). Furthermore, a lion was present in the logo of the first coalition of opposition groups founded in the aftermath of the Socialist Party leader's resignation in 1989: originally its anthropomorphic figure was portrayed smiling and making the universal sign for peace, but was recently replaced by a schematic profile of a lion, facing to the right in a markedly combative posture. As previously discussed, various conservative and neo-Nazi organizations also frequently use stylized figures of lions.

Tracing the reoccurrence of the lion on various artefacts and communicative tools of the state but also of parties or past and present political movements, demonstrates that it is linked to ideas of desired or projected national integrity. At the same time, the lion's seemingly unshakable symbolic links to notions of 'Bulgarianness' are predicated upon a long process of transmission and transformation, whose beginnings cannot be pinned down to any one moment in time. These transmissions rely on sources that have always been 'foreign' to what is today considered as 'Bulgaria': for instance, one of the earliest accounts of a lion-like creature on a coat of arms stems from sketches by a fourteenth century anonymous traveller from the Middle East who visited the town Turnovo (Heraldika-bg n.d.).

According to Yuk Hui who engages with the workings of recursion, the search for a 'first cause' is futile, but one should instead seek it in the totality of the loop (cf. Hui 2019: 7). Hui describes recursion as a 'looping movement of returning to itself in order to determine itself' (Hui 2019: 5). This movement, he stresses, is not a mere repetition but is more akin to a spiral or a loop. As Stoler also recognizes in her writing, the notion of recursion can be of use for historical analysis in cases when it is impossible to determine a single originary moment and where the dichotomy between continuity and rupture proves unproductive. If we return to the series of Bulgarian lions and read them as recursive events that derive from *and* co-constitute a loop, it appears that an analysis that attempts to construct a coherent lineage out of these partial, fragmented transmissions and re-occurrences of different lions would find itself fumbling with the effort to hold together their contingent materializations. It is instead important to heed the way in which these recursive events are nested within larger patterns (cf. Fuller and Goffey 2012) – for example, when representations of 'Bulgarian' lions evoke officialized representations of power and are instrumentalized in efforts to construct a coherent national identity. Their iteration and repositioning indicate a continuous struggle over who gets to 'hold the lion' – whose

ties to a notion of immutable Bulgarianness are stabilized through time and by means of its recursive emergence.

My contention is that the insistence on either a definite break or seamless continuity between these occurrences hinders a transversal analysis across scales; in this, I am close to Stoler's pursuit of a method that allows us to think beyond 'the bifurcated alternatives that continuity and rupture invite' (Stoler 2016: 26). For her, recursive analytics is an approach that permits us to instead recognize that '[t]hese histories are [...] processes of partial reinscriptions, modified displacements, and amplified recuperations' (Stoler 2016: 27). A reading of the re-occurrence of figures of lions on the terrain of Bulgarian nationalism in terms of recursive events emphasizes semiotic, functional and social shifts across situations, while accounting for the way in which they still maintain a relation to overarching tropes of the 'national' (that they co-constitute).

Such reinscriptions can be found in moments such as when, in 2017, the socialist modernist monument was demolished and replaced by the sculpted lion from the Monument to the First Sofia Division. Its reappearance is not about merely abstracting an element from the earlier memorial and inserting it into a novel context. Rather, its associated meanings and histories are strategically displaced so as to serve a function in and for the present. The lion projects a sense of nationalist pride grounded on expansionist territorial claims,ⁱ while its reintroduction into public space precisely ahead of Bulgaria's assumption of the Presidency of the Council of Europe can be read in line with a revisionist tendency of rehabilitating vestiges from the pre-socialist, supposedly more 'European', period of the country's history.^j To understand the operative logic of the lion as a recursive figure means understanding that it is *productive* of political and historical meaning in that it connects and links certain aspects and characteristics of the present to certain aspects of the past. With Stoler, who borrows this formulation from Jonathan Goldberg, we could say that, as a recursive figure, the lion is involved in the production of a 'strange continuity' (Stoler 2016: 28) of nationalism.

Adopting a recursive analytical approach means that symbolically charged figures, such as the 'Bulgarian lion', can be appraised not as mere repetitions of the same type of nationalism over and over again, nor as individualized, singular events. Rather, a recursive approach allows us to attend to the kinds of patterns they co-constitute and to whose continuation in time and space they contribute. Furthermore, the specific way in which these recursive figures are nested in other recursions could become a subject of analysis. The aim is not to reduce to each other the two monuments, but rather to insist on their specificity: with their different iterations, histories of obfuscation and destruction, with their differently nested lions, their disparate claims to historical time, the diverging ways in which they frame the idea of the nation vis-à-vis the past and the future, their contrasting spatio-visual characteristics and political function. '1300 Years of Bulgaria' and the monument to the First Sofia Division are engaged in a different way in perpetuating a loop, of putting forward and construing a strange continuity of the national, of stabilizing a pattern with violent and exclusionary effects. Present-day nationalisms of the post-socialist kind are the never-quite-completed outcome of an overlaying of these

patterns. These nationalisms can be accessed, analysed and, this is the hope, countered when attending to the specific workings of the recursive operations meant to secure their endurance and propagation into the future.

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Competing Interests

The author declares none.

Notes

- a. An array of photographic books documenting monumental vestiges of the socialist period have been published in the last decade (Dumitru 2020; cf. Mihov 2012; Niebyl 2018). Owen Hatherley's work, which mixes analytical, anecdotal, and documentary approaches to post-socialist landscapes, is also worth mentioning here (2012, 2015).
- b. The latter was a campaign for forced assimilation of ethnic and religious minorities executed by the socialist government and culminating in the mass exodus of thousands of Bulgarian Muslims to Turkey.
- c. See Gueorguieva (2017) for such a reading.
- d. For instance, in relation to marginalized groups, such as women, LGBTQ+ people or migrants, the positions of the state, Orthodox church and far-right groups are more consistent than not.
- e. Photographs can be viewed on the NETWORLD Database: <https://tinyurl.com/2er9mztt>. An image featuring a uniformed male making the Nazi salute in front of the lion can be seen at: Stroiteli.bg (2018).
- f. See Valiavicharska (2014) for a thorough reading of the monument's modernist style, the way it departed from the socialist realist canon, and a critique of the erasures characterizing the narration of the national history.
- g. This map includes parts of today's Romania, North Macedonia, and Greece.
- h. Claims to territorial integrity and historical inculpability are, for instance, articulated in opposition to North Macedonia's EU accession or the entry of migrants (especially Muslim) in the country. Calls to maintain Bulgaria's demographic purity target women's reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ politics, and Roma and Turkish minorities.
- i. It is not surprising that Greece responded sharply on this occasion, as parts of its present-day territory are included on the map held by the lion (Mitov 2017).
- j. A trope often mobilized in conjunction with a reappraisal of the pre-socialist monarchic regime has to do with the ties that the country maintained with other European monarchies during this time, and which were severed by the socialist regime's allegiance to the Soviet Union. A particularly instructive example can be found in Sofia's Regional History Museum. See Boris Buden (2009, 2015) for a critique of the political mechanisms of an alignment between ex-socialist and Western European countries during the transition period, which he describes as conforming to a logic of 'catching up' and historical belatedness.

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